



Russell Meyers, CEO of Midland Health

COVID-19 Public Briefing: Thursday, September 24th, 2020

Transcribed from a previously recorded live event.

Mr. Meyers: Good morning everyone. It's Thursday, September 24th and this is our Coronavirus update from Midland Health. I am Russell Meyers, CEO of Midland Health. Starting with some numbers statewide, total case count now is approaching 720,000; over 15,000 deaths in the state to date. Here in Midland County, 3,588 cases and 82 deaths so far during the course of the pandemic. The hospital census has been high and continues to be so, 173 patients today. We've been very full in Critical Care and a number of days recently have had to put off transfer requests or on occasion just have day to day expectations for those restrictions. But as of today, we have 11 patients in Critical Care. We have 7 COVID patients total, 3 of those Critical Care and 4 of them in the Medical Unit. We are down to only 1 patient from the Ashton Medical Lodge now as that outbreak seems to be under control. Among our employees, we have only 4 that are known to be COVID positive and are being quarantined. We have 4 other employees who are in quarantined for other purposes and a total of 13 who have had some level of exposure and are self-monitoring, but not in quarantine.

In testing news, the test volumes have gone up, have been trending up the last few days about 70 a day here lately. The positive percentages are also going up. Last week, after 2 weeks ago being down as low as 8%, they were back in the mid 9s. So far this week, we are over 11% of those being tested who are positive. That's potentially significant. We know this is a time of the year when we were expecting to see at least a small uptick as the Labor Day exposures have now had 10 days or so to incubate. We are also testing more people which you would think would drop the percentage positive rate. So, we're going in the opposite direction there. That's interesting. Certainly, not long enough to be a trend, but we're watching. We're in the 11%+ positive rates this week so far. We've gotten positive results from a few places where there are congregations, the Rockhouse facility is one. The jail is another. There are a few positive tests in the jail, and we've been talking to jail leadership about how best to manage those issues and keeping an eye on that. So far, no hospitalizations from either of those settings. The last thing on testing is school aged kids. So far at our testing sites, only 3, all of them in the 14 – 17 years of age grouping, only 3 positives so far since school return has been underway.

I'd like to remind you that flu shots are available now in the community. We've published some information. Is that available on our website now? (asking someone off camera, response not heard) There are multiple locations around the community, and we put a few of them up on our website. We're vaccinating our employees this week. We'll get most of the workforce done. The vaccines have been available to patients who are inpatients. We have protocols for the delivery of the vaccine to inpatients and we're carrying those out now. There are multiple versions of the flu shot. The one I got because I'm over 50 years of age this year happens to be the one that is egg free. And I don't remember an egg free vaccine in the past, so anybody who's had challenges with egg allergy or reactions, there is now a flu shot available for you that will avoid those concerns. We still encourage people to get a flu shot this year. That question has come up a lot, it is possible as we understand it and apparently there have been a few cases in other places where both COVID and flu have been positive and co-existing in the same patient. You can imagine that would be a particularly difficult case to manage. And so, let's



manage what we can. If you possibly can get a flu shot, then get one. Let's avoid or mitigate the flu symptom especially while we're in this current condition.

We've got a couple of things that are coming up next week that I think are important. The state's emergency order that the Department of Health Services issued restricting visitation in hospitals is expiring next week and I do intend to have another Facebook live session on Tuesday and we should be able to give you the exact details on how we are modifying our visitation rules. We're talking about those a little bit more today and by next week we'll be able to give you full details and probably implement those next Wednesday after the state's order expires. In all likelihood, we'll be allowing a single visitor for the vast majority of our patients, both in and outpatients. That's an expansion from the restrictive visitation that we are doing now and we're hoping to have that in place, announced next week, and ready to go by Wednesday.

In addition, we are talking a good bit among our physicians and especially our outpatient practices about what protocols ought to be appropriate as we move into respiratory disease season. Not only is COVID still present in the community, but we have the flu, we have RSV among children. There are challenges in distinguishing among those disease processes and we have some ideas about how best to test and evaluate patients to give our doctors guidance on treatment regimens that might be appropriate depending on lab results and also to keep patients safe as they come into our physician's offices, as they wait for appointments, as they are seen in exam rooms. Lots of really good ideas in the works. So far, our physicians report that the process of going to the physician, the patient visits, have been particularly safe and handled very well. For the most part, physicians affiliated with the hospital are asking patients to wait in their cars and not use the waiting room to much of an extent. Asking them to come in alone to the exam rooms so we don't cram small exam rooms with multiple people. We expect we'll continue some of those ideas and expand on them as respiratory disease season comes along. So, more on that next week as those ideas are more fully developed. And we'll be offering that guidance, not only to the people in the community, but to all of our physicians who would be interested in what the hospital affiliated practices are doing.

Let's see, I believe that is all that I have on that. I'd like to call on Tasa now to give you an update on our virtual Wellness Tour. Tasa, it's all yours.

Tasa Richardson, Midland Health Public Relations Manager: Ok, thank you Russell. Good morning everyone. We are very excited that we are able to kick off our 6th annual Wellness Tour on this Tuesday, this past Tuesday of this week. It's a week full of health and wellness events for our entire community. And it's focused on bringing the whole family to health and wellness conversations. This year it does look a little bit different. It is mostly virtual, but I'd like to take this time to thank our partners that helped make this happen this year: The City of Midland, MISD, and Keep Midland Beautiful. Without them working along side us, it wouldn't have been possible this year, so thank you to all of them. We do have events that continue this week and they go through Saturday. So, please visit www.MidlandWellnessTour.com to look at all the details. We hope to see you out there.

Mr. Meyers: Thank you Tasa, very much. That's a great event we hold every year. We've been fortunate over the last several years to have been able to partner with the City and the schools and others in the community and you know we are doing it less in person this year as we are doing most



things, but still has lots to offer to everybody in the community as you strive to make your life healthier. So, that is the extent of our prepared remarks and we're prepared to take questions if you have them.

Tasa: We have a question from Facebook, is there an immunity once positive to COVID-19?

Mr. Meyers: Is there an immunity once positive COVID-19? That has been an interesting question that's been asked for a long time. I think there's uncertainty around that. Most patients develop antibodies. You know our source of convalescent plasma which is one of the treatment regimens we use is patients who have recovered, developed antibodies in their system, donated plasma so that those antibodies can be given to other patients. Is there certainty about immunity post recovery? I don't think there is. And we're still learning about how long those antibodies last and how long they are effective. (Comments off camera not heard) Some people may have other pathways to immunity. I don't know that we've seen anybody reinfect in our community. At this point, there are a handful of stories about secondary infections around the country, around the world, but still the jury's out on whether immunity lasts, well, how long it lasts, essentially.

Tasa: We have a question from Stewart Doreen from the MRT. Has the school district reached out about the increasing numbers on their campuses?

Mr. Meyers: We are sort of in continuous communication with various school officials. I know that Val Sparks and her counterpart in the health department within the schools talk regularly. You know, we're not really involved in the decision making at the school district. And so what I understand they are actively discussing now going back to full classrooms, full schools, everyday school, but we're not really actively involved in that discussion beyond our regular communication with the schools around management of the disease.

Tasa: He has a follow up question. Did you expect a bigger Labor Day bump? It doesn't seem to be overwhelming.

Mr. Meyers: Yeah, I would say that I did. I'm not sure we're past it yet, you know. The 14 days post Labor Day is not until this coming Monday, so we're still a few days away from that. But yeah, I would say that I expected us to ramp up just a little bit more than we have. Especially when you consider Labor Day in combination with some return to school, with some return to college, with, you know, a variety of opening efforts going on around the community. I'm encouraged by that. I hope that it means that our citizens are continuing to follow the careful social distancing guidelines, staying out of crowds, staying in ventilated spaces when they have to be in a crowd, wearing a mask, washing their hands, all of the measures that we've all been taking for several months now that have controlled the disease outbreak in this community to a great extent. As long as those things are still happening, then we can keep a lid on the growth. We are hopeful about that. And Labor Day, you know the risk isn't over yet, but it's been encouraging so far.

Tasa: It appears that's all the questions we have for this morning.

Mr. Meyers: Alright, well we thank you for your attention. Encourage you to partake in any of the Wellness Tour activities that interest you and we'll see you again on Tuesday with information about visitation changes and whatever other news there is by then. Thank you.